



August 18, 2008

Senate panel approves measures to strengthen child protection laws

Legislation to ensure accountability in the handling of child protection cases and improve agency communication was recently approved by the Senate Family and Human Services Committee.

Senate Bill 1418 will require the Michigan Department of Human Services to collaborate with local Friend of the Court offices on cases where a child is the subject of a protective services investigation and a custody or parenting time case is also pending.

Other legislation in the four-bill package will:

- Require the department to develop an investigation checklist for statewide use in child abuse and neglect investigations;
- Clarify definitions for child protective service workers determining whether or not to remove a child from a home;
- Add Friend of the Court employees to the list of mandatory reporters for child abuse and neglect; and
- Require Friend of the Court to notify DHS of any procedural developments in custody or parenting time cases.

Earlier this year the panel convened a hearing to examine the department's response to the October 2007 death of Nicholas Braman. A department report on its handling of the case concluded that more could and should have been done to protect the 9-year-old. The committee continues to explore policy improvements to ensure vulnerable children are safe.

Oliver Braman, Nicholas' father, had a documented history of violence. Nicholas' two older brothers were removed from their father's custody. Ultimately, Oliver pled guilty to second-degree child abuse and was facing jail when he took Nicholas' life.

Senate Bills 1418 through 1421 now head to the full Senate for consideration.

Veterans Welcome Home Act becomes law

Letters mailed by the state to returning war veterans are required to include a list of all state-funded veterans service organizations under the newly signed Veterans Welcome Home Act.

The law is designed to ensure returning vets are informed of the many service organizations available to help them start a business, continue their education, or assist them with veteran's benefits.

Senate Bill 754, now Public Act 176 of 2008, requires the Department of Labor and Economic Growth to include the list in its welcome-home letter. The list would be ordered according to the amount of state funding, with the group that receives the most state funding listed first and the remaining organizations listed in descending order.

The new law has the support of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Catholic War Veterans, and takes effect immediately.

Senate approves bill allowing 'peace officers' to carry stun guns

Legislation allowing "Reserve peace officers" to carry and use taser and stun guns while performing official duties was recently approved by the Senate.

Many law enforcement officials believe tasers are a safe and effective means of protection that can subdue, but not kill a suspect. Stun guns are used by more than 12,700 U.S. law enforcement and military agencies.

Senate Bill 519 allows Reserve peace officers to possess and use a taser or stun gun, permitting they have been trained on how to properly use the devices, their effects and risks.

The proposal is supported by the Michigan Chiefs of Police Association, the Police Officers Association of Michigan and the Michigan Court Officers Deputy Sheriff's Association.

SB 519 has been referred to the House Judiciary Committee for consideration.

Senate measure to encourage groceries to sell more nutritious foods signed

Legislation to help ensure that residents across the state have adequate access to grocery stores selling fresh fruits and vegetables was recently signed by the governor.

Public Act 231 of 2008 allows local units of government to offer tax abatements for up to 10 years for grocery stores established in redeveloping areas.

Residents of low-income areas often lack access to stores with nutritious foods and suffer higher rates of obesity, malnutrition and diet-related disease. The shortage of grocery stores means residents must travel to find nutritious food, something many lower-income residents cannot afford to do. The alternative is to shop at more expensive convenience stores that stock less nutritious food products.

The tax abatement is only available for grocery stores that provide fresh meat, fruits and vegetables, and dairy products, and are established in underserved areas located in core communities or in underserved rural places as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Contact information

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